

THE HELLENISTIC HERITAGE IN BYZANTINE ART

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THE title of this paper calls to mind that of a famous book published two generations ago, Dimitri Ainalov's *Hellenistic Foundations of Byzantine Art*.¹ Together with Strzygowski's *Orient oder Rom*, which was published almost simultaneously, Ainalov's work was instrumental in changing the entire orientation of research concerning the origins and early history of Christian art—and Byzantine art in particular—by focusing attention on the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean littoral, countries which nineteenth-century scholarship in this field had largely ignored because of an undue and exclusive preoccupation with Rome. Thus Ainalov's primary concern was geographic and ethnic. He used the term "Hellenistic" to denote the Greek East as opposed to the Latin West, and his main purpose was to show how many key phenomena in Byzantine art were rooted in the former rather than in the latter. From his point of view it mattered little whether these roots actually lay in the Hellenistic *period*, rather than in the preceding classical or the succeeding Roman age.

By contrast, I shall use the term "Hellenistic" in a more strictly chronological sense. That is to say, I shall concentrate on achievements and innovations of the Hellenistic period proper² and discuss their subsequent role in the Byzantine development. In doing so, I shall take the position that certain aspects of the art, not only of the first century B.C. but also of the first century A.D., are in the pure Hellenistic tradition and, indeed, constitute the final phase of the Hellenistic development.³ But I shall omit from my discussion the art more specifically characteristic of the Roman Empire. At the same time, it is, of course, essential to bear in mind that Byzantium had its direct continuity with Roman art rather than with Hellenistic art proper. To confine my enquiry to such direct contacts as Byzantine artists may have had with genuinely Hellenistic work would be patently impossible. Even in the relatively well documented field of statuary it is difficult to isolate, within Byzantium's patrimony of ancient art, authentically Hellenistic monuments.⁴ The whole extremely obscure and complex question of the identity and the age of the ancient works actually available to Byzantine artists must necessarily be left aside. Undoubtedly much of the ancient heritage came to the Byzantines through works of the Roman, or even the late Roman period, and was transformed, or at least diluted, in the process. But it is also true that the Roman era copied, transmitted, and perpetuated a wealth of Hellenistic art, and it is, therefore, possible and legitimate to enquire into

¹ D. V. Ainalov, *Ellenisticheskiia osnovy vizantiiskago iskusstva* (St. Petersburg, 1900); English translation, edited by C. Mango, in the Rutgers Byzantine Series under the title *The Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Art* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1961).

² See G. M. A. Hanfmann's complementary paper on "Hellenistic Art" in the preceding pages of this volume (p. 77 ff.; hereafter cited as Hanfmann).

³ Hanfmann, p. 82.

⁴ Cf. C. Mango's paper in this volume; especially p. 55.

the subsequent destiny of elements and traits specifically and indisputably Hellenistic, provided only one never loses sight of the possibility, or even likelihood, that many of these elements and traits were known to Byzantine artists not at first hand but through a shorter or longer chain of intermediaries.

My subject is vast, bearing as it does on all periods and all aspects of Byzantine art, and my treatment will be not only extremely sketchy but also highly selective. I shall leave aside entirely some aspects that have been explored and discussed extensively in recent scholarly literature. Kurt Weitzmann has studied the survival in Byzantine art of representations from ancient mythology,⁵ André Grabar the Hellenistic element in the large and important realm of Byzantine imperial iconography.⁶ To Weitzmann again we owe comprehensive studies of the ancient heritage of manuscript illustration in general, and illustration of scientific texts in particular, these latter having been the original point of departure of Ainalov's investigations.⁷ In all these categories subject matter or artistic medium, or both, provide tangible guide lines in tracing Hellenistic roots and traditions, and, although there are still unsolved problems, a firm basis has been established in every instance. My discussion will be concerned with the more elusive role played by the Hellenistic heritage in the *religious* art of Byzantium, though I hasten to say that I shall exclude architecture, which is perhaps the most problematic subject of all.

In many ways Hellenistic art seems a most unlikely source of inspiration or norms for Byzantine religious painting and sculpture. With its predilection for the grandiose and the pathetic, the romantic and the idyllic, the humorous and the grotesque, for genre and eroticism, Hellenistic pictorial art embodies the pagan world at its most pagan. Yet there are unquestionably many, and very prominent, works of Byzantine religious art in which the Hellenistic element is very strong. We need think only of the paintings of Castelseprio, the miniatures of the Paris Psalter, or the mosaics of the Kariye Djami. In what precise sense, however, do such works deserve the epithet "Hellenistic"? What are the sources and carriers of the Hellenistic elements which appear in them? And—most elusive problem of all—what do these elements mean in the contexts in which they come to be used? We do not always face up to the paradox which is implied in the formula "Hellenistic foundations of Byzantine art." We tend to forget how odd it really is to see episodes in the life of the biblical David or prophetic visions of the Old Testament enacted in the midst of a romantic landscape, originally created to delight the leisure classes of Pergamon, Ephesos, or Alexandria; or to find the writers of the Gospels seated against backdrops of fantastic architectures closely akin to those which in the first century B.C. were painted on the walls of a villa at Boscoreale. Is

⁵ K. Weitzmann, *Greek Mythology in Byzantine Art* (Princeton, 1951); *idem*, "The Survival of Mythological Representations in Early Christian and Byzantine Art and their Impact on Christian Iconography," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 14 (1960), p. 43 ff.

⁶ A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin* (Paris, 1936).

⁷ K. Weitzmann, *Roll and Codex* (Princeton, 1947); *idem*, *Ancient Book Illumination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959).

all this Hellenism in Byzantine religious art so much ballast, dried up formulae, meaningless trappings? Or, if it is not meaningless, what was its function? Such problems tend to get lost from sight in the debate over models and prototypes in which those of us who study the history of Byzantine art are perpetually engaged. They seem to me worthy of an hour's reflection. For it is certainly true to say that, to our generation at least, the Hellenistic features in Byzantine art often are a source of greater puzzlement (albeit, in many instances, unrecognized and unarticulated puzzlement) than the "abstract" and "mediaeval" ones which caused difficulties to earlier generations.⁸ We may not be able to reach any firm answers, but at least we shall have asked some questions which perhaps should be raised more frequently.

My procedure will be to take up one by one a number of elements that are specifically characteristic of Hellenistic art and to consider their subsequent fortunes in Byzantium. The selection of these elements was made in consultation with Professor Hanfmann, whose own paper, printed in this volume, provides a discussion of these same elements within the context of Hellenistic art. In effect, the two papers represent a joint effort on the part of two specialized scholars to isolate some significant strands in the complex web of connections between their respective fields and to do so without unduly distorting the over-all image of either Hellenistic or Byzantine art.⁹

Some of the topics discussed by Professor Hanfmann may be given short shrift. There is no eroticism in Byzantine art—religious or secular. Nor is there anything that could be properly called humor. The absence of the latter element is noteworthy, considering the strength of the Hellenistic precedent and the amount of humor that emerged in the art—even the religious art—of the West in the course of the Middle Ages, at least by way of byplay. But, at any rate, here already a measure of selectivity becomes apparent in the Byzantine approach to the Hellenistic heritage.

I turn to *picturesque and idyllic genre*, for which there was considerable scope in Byzantine art. Pastoral idyls, for instance, found a natural place not only in the illustration of the lives of Old Testament heroes, such as Jacob, Joseph, and David, but also in connection with such texts as Psalm 32¹⁰ and Gregory of Nazianzus' homily on New Sunday,¹¹ and most commonly, of course, in the portrayal of the shepherds of Bethlehem receiving the glad

⁸ The fact that in this respect the attitude toward Byzantine art has undergone a significant change during the twentieth century frequently goes unrecognized; see, however, W. Weidle, "Les caractères distinctifs du style byzantin et le problème de sa différenciation par rapport à l'occident," *Actes du VI^e congrès international d'études byzantines* (Paris, 27 juillet—2 août 1948), 2 (Paris, 1951), p. 411 ff., especially p. 412. Weidle's interesting paper touches upon several of the problems which will concern us here (cf. particularly p. 111 *infra*).

⁹ I wish to record here my gratitude to Professor Hanfmann for agreeing to this collaborative effort and for his unfailing helpfulness and stimulating criticism throughout its progress.

¹⁰ J. J. Tikkanen, *Die Psalterillustration im Mittelalter* (Helsingfors, 1895), p. 21 and fig. 16 (British Museum, MS Add. 19352, fol. 36^r).

¹¹ H. Omont, *Miniatures des plus anciens manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris, 1929), pl. 104, figs. 2–5 (MS gr. 533); pl. 117, figs. 17–19 (MS Coislin 239).

tidings of the birth of Christ. Again, in depicting the sick healed by Christ and His saints, artists were able to draw on the repertory of pathetic types which Hellenistic art had delighted in creating. As an example, I quote the young man with matchstick limbs on the Carrand Diptych in Florence (fig. 2)¹²—one of the sick Maltese being brought before St. Paul (Acts 28: 8–9)—whose artistic ancestry is beautifully exemplified by the bronze statuette of an emaciated man in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (fig. 1).¹³ The accounts—canonical or apocryphal—of the infancy of Christ and the Virgin Mary gave the illustrating artists occasion to preserve or revive something of the imagery of babyhood which Hellenistic art had so lovingly explored.¹⁴ These are all themes in connection with which Hellenistic survivals and revivals occurred naturally.

I want to single out, however, for a somewhat more detailed discussion one motif from the last-named sphere, whose presence in Christian art was not entirely a matter of course, namely, the Child's first bath. The representation of this intimate detail from the life of the nursery is not called for either by the Gospels or by any of the apocryphal accounts habitually followed by the artists. Yet it came to be practically *de rigueur* even in the most solemn, "iconic," and monumental of Byzantine "feast cycles." I single out this motif because, not being warranted by the texts, it can serve particularly well to illustrate the power and impetus of the Hellenistic heritage in the *artistic* sphere, and can, moreover, lead us to an understanding of some of the factors and motivating forces that helped to ensure the survival or revival of such elements.

The Child's bath was not originally part of the iconography of the Nativity of Christ. The earliest dated representation is in the early eighth-century mosaics of the Oratory of Pope John VII in Old St. Peter's in Rome (fig. 5).¹⁵ Certain other examples may be somewhat earlier, but we have a sufficient

¹² W. F. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters* (Mainz, 1952), no. 108 and pl. 32.

¹³ G. M. A. Richter, *Catalogue of Greek and Roman Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), no. 17 and pl. 14.

¹⁴ Hanfmann, p. 85f. Cf. e.g. the characteristically infant-like gestures and attitudes assumed by the Christ Child in the Presentation in the Temple at a certain stage in the development of that scene (D. C. Shorr, in *Art Bulletin*, 28 [1946], p. 17ff., especially p. 23ff.; *ibid.*, fig. 12, and Hanfmann, fig. 17, representations of the infant Dionysus for comparison). The Child in the scene of the Adoration of the Magi undergoes a comparable development (E. Kitzinger, in *The Relics of Saint Cuthbert* [Durham, 1956], pp. 256, 260, note 3). For the playful and affectionate Christ Child in non-narrative representations of the Virgin, its Hellenistic antecedents, its tenuous survival in early Byzantine art, and its new pre-eminence in the art of the post-iconoclastic period, see *ibid.*, p. 248ff., especially pp. 250, 258, and *infra* p. 112. For the nursing Mother—a motif which has specific associations with Egypt, both in its roots and in the early stages of its Christian development—see K. Wessel, "Eine Grabstele aus Medinet el-Fajum: Zum Problem der Maria Lactans," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin* (Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe, 3), IV (1954–55), p. 149ff.; also R. P. Hinks, in *British Museum Quarterly*, 12 (1938), p. 74f. and pl. 27b (a particularly strongly Hellenized and genre-like representation of Isis with the infant Horus, not noticed by Wessel). For scenes from the infancy of the Virgin see H. Chirat, "La naissance et les trois premières années de la Vierge Marie dans l'art byzantin," *Memorial J. Chaine*, Bibliothèque de la Faculté catholique de théologie de Lyon, 5 (Lyon, 1950), p. 81ff., and the forthcoming comprehensive study of the subject by J. Lafontaine.

¹⁵ M. van Berchem and E. Clouzot, *Mosaïques chrétiennes du IV^{me} au X^{me} siècle* (Geneva, 1924), p. 209ff., especially p. 212. A monograph on these mosaics by P. J. Nordhagen is forthcoming.

number of sixth-century representations of the Nativity to be able to say that at that time the bath was not yet a normal element in the iconography of the scene.¹⁶ It had been, however, a stock motif in the representation of childbirth which often formed part of "biographical" picture cycles in antiquity. It figured in the birth of divine or divinely begotten infants¹⁷—specifically Dionysus,¹⁸ Achilles,¹⁹ and Alexander the Great²⁰—but also in that of ordinary, anonymous mortals.²¹ In one instance, the episode was included in the representation of the birth of an imperial prince, or at least in a poetic description of such a representation.²² While extant ancient works depicting the baby's bath all date from Roman times, the invention is undoubtedly Hellenistic and in its ultimate origins perhaps even older.²³ Its inclusion in life cycles of divine and heroic persons in all probability preceded its appearance in the pictorial biographies of ordinary mortals.

Several scholars have sought to prove that Christian artists took over the motif specifically from representations of the birth of Dionysus.²⁴ One at least of these Dionysiac examples—a textile from Antinoë in the Louvre—is as late as the fourth or fifth century (fig. 4).²⁵ The assumption would be that in this case an artist of the sixth, or more probably the seventh, century sought inspiration in surviving illustrations of a pagan mythological subject to introduce a new—and henceforth almost obligatory—element into the Nativity scene. It would be an interesting example of the spell exercised by the Hellenistic heritage even in a period of Byzantine art history which does not rank among the principal "renaissance" phases, and of the abiding importance of representations from ancient mythology (which, of course, were reproduced in Byzantium even much later) in transmitting the ancient heritage to Byzantine religious art.

I do not rule out the possibility that this is indeed the correct interpretation of the data at hand. But it seems to me much more likely that a link is missing in this genealogy. For one thing, the fact that the child's first bath

¹⁶ P. J. Nordhagen, "The Origin of the Washing of the Child in the Nativity Scene," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 54 (1961), p. 333ff. M. Lawrence, "Three Pagan Themes in Christian Art," *De artibus opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, I (New York, 1961), p. 323ff., especially p. 329f.

¹⁷ E. R. Goodenough, "The Paintings of the Dura-Europos Synagogue: Method and an Application," *Israel Exploration Journal*, 8 (1958), p. 69ff., especially p. 78.

¹⁸ Nordhagen, *op. cit.*, p. 334ff. and pl. 13; Lawrence, *op. cit.*, p. 327f.; G. Babić, "Sur l'iconographie de la composition 'Nativité de la Vierge' dans la peinture byzantine," *Recueil de travaux de l'Institut d'études byzantines*, 7 (Belgrade, 1961), p. 169ff., especially p. 170f. In addition to the references given in these three recent papers, see A. Maiuri, *La casa del Menandro* (Rome, n.d. [1933]), p. 338, fig. 131 and pl. 39 (our fig. 7).

¹⁹ G. A. S. Snyder, "The So-called Puteal in the Capitoline Museum at Rome," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 13 (1923), p. 56ff., especially p. 61 and pl. 1.

²⁰ M. Chehab, *Mosaïques du Liban* (= *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth*, 14-15, 1958-9), p. 46ff. and pls. 22, 25 (our fig. 6).

²¹ G. Becatti, "Rilievo con la nascita di Dioniso e aspetti mistici di Ostia pagana," *Bollettino d'arte*, 36 (1951), p. 1ff., especially p. 3ff.; see also D. Facenna, in *Notizie degli scavi*, 76 (1951), p. 114ff. and fig. 2 for an interesting sarcophagus found in Via Portuense in 1949 (I owe this reference to Mlle. J. Lafontaine, now Mme. Dosogne).

²² See *infra*, note 26.

²³ Hanfmann, p. 86, note 38.

²⁴ Nordhagen, *op. cit.*, p. 334 (with further references); Lawrence, *op. cit.*, p. 327ff.

²⁵ Nordhagen, *op. cit.*, p. 336; Lawrence, *op. cit.*, p. 328 with note 30.

figured (poetically, at least) in *imperial* iconography should give one pause, in view of the manifold instances of an "imperialization" of Christian religious art. It was the new-born child of Honorius and Maria whom Claudianus, the contemporary poet, pictured as having been thus portrayed.²⁶ Supposing that such pictorial renderings of imperial births actually existed at the time and continued to be in vogue also in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, would not these be a likely source of inspiration for those who added the baby's bath to the Nativity scene? But what is probably more important, and, at any rate, somewhat more tangible, is the presence of the motif in birth scenes relating to figures from the Old Testament. The extant examples are of relatively late date, and in many instances the representation of the bath is probably due to a reverse influence from scenes of Christ's Nativity or other New Testament birth scenes.²⁷ This, however, is not likely in the case of the cycle of scenes from Genesis in the atrium of S. Marco in Venice, where the bath motif occurs in the birth of Ishmael (fig. 3) and in the birth of Isaac. Because the iconography of the S. Marco mosaics follows so closely that of the Cotton Genesis Manuscript, there is an *a priori* probability that the midwives with baby and washbasin (grouped, incidentally, in S. Marco in a manner which strongly calls to mind the bath of the infant Dionysus in the textile in the Louvre) were present also in that fifth-century manuscript, in which the relevant details have not survived.²⁸ Thus Old Testament illustrations of early date emerge as a possible carrier of a Hellenistic motif subsequently incorporated in New Testament iconography.²⁹ There will be occasion in this paper to make other parallel observations. We need not here go into the question as to whether Old Testament illustrations came into being during the Hellenistic period itself, or only in Roman times. For Byzantine artists these illustrations provided a readily available and, so to speak, self-perpetuating reservoir of Hellenistic traditions. Awareness of this factor may serve as a corrective to an excessive reliance on "Hellenistic revivals."

But there was a revival, too. It has been observed that in all early representations of the bath in Nativity scenes, i.e. in all examples earlier than the tenth century, the Christ Child is shown upright in the basin.³⁰ Usually He is being

²⁶ Cl. Claudianus, *Carmina*, XXII (= *De consulatu Stilichonis*, II), 345-7 (ed. by Th. Birt, *MGH, Auctores Antiquissimi*, 10 [Berlin, 1892], p. 215). Cf. A. Frolow, in *Études byzantines*, 3 (1945), p. 80.

²⁷ Cf., e.g., miniatures in the Byzantine Octateuchs depicting the birth of Isaac and Moses (D. C. Hesseling, *Miniatures de l'octateuque grec de Smyrne* [Leyden, 1909], figs. 72, 152; *Izvestiia of the Russian Archaeological Institute in Constantinople*, 12 (1907), Album, pl. 19, fig. 92); or the scenes of the birth of David discussed and illustrated by K. Weitzmann, *Illustrations in Roll and Codex* (Princeton, 1947), p. 151f. and fig. 140f.

²⁸ For the birth of Isaac in S. Marco and the fragment of the corresponding miniature in the Cotton MS (a fragment which is defective in the area crucial for our purpose), see J. J. Tikkanen, *Die Genesis-mosaiken von S. Marco in Venedig und ihr Verhältnis zu den Miniaturen der Cottonbibel* (reprinted from *Acta Societatis Scientiarum Fennicae*, 17 [Helsingfors, 1889]), p. 106 and pl. 13, fig. 98f. The miniature depicting the birth of Ishmael is lost altogether, as Professor Weitzmann has kindly informed me.

²⁹ Such a chain of transmission was suggested long ago by M. Schmid, *Die Darstellung der Geburt Christi in der bildenden Kunst* (Stuttgart, 1890), p. 94f.

³⁰ K. Weitzmann, "Das Evangelium im Skevophylakion zu Lavra," *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, 8 (1936), p. 83ff., especially p. 90.

held up by one of the midwives seated on the side. This is the arrangement even in Castelseprio, which in rendering and mood is by far the most "Hellenistic" of all the early examples (fig. 12).³¹ Beginning with the tenth century, however, we find the Child reclining in relaxed fashion either in the basin or on the nurse's lap.³² Quite often the Child, when reclining in the basin, is held by a midwife seated not beside but behind Him and, as it were, enveloping Him in a protective pose (fig. 8). This does appear to be a case of reversion to a Hellenistic type, as exemplified by the "Birth of Dionysus" on one of the silver cups from the Casa del Menandro in Pompeii (fig. 7). In the tenth century there also appears, or rather reappears, the charming touch of the nurse trying out with her hand the temperature of the bath water,³³ a detail which will then be repeated in many other Nativity scenes down to the end of the Middle Ages.³⁴ I say "reappears," because the designer of a Roman floor mosaic found some years ago at Baa bek imagined the nymph who bathed the infant Alexander to have taken the same precaution (fig. 6).³⁵

Thus the bath scene is a good test case with which to demonstrate both the *survival* of Hellenistic elements in Byzantium (with biblical and possibly mythological iconography acting as important means of transmission) and the *revival* phenomenon characteristic of certain phases, and most especially of the period of the "Macedonian Renaissance."

To what extent, however, are we justified in dealing with the baby's bath under the general heading of "genre"? Charming and touching as the details may be, does there not lie concealed within them a deep and solemn meaning, both in the Hellenistic and the Christian versions? I have said that at the outset the representation of the first bath probably belonged exclusively to the life cycle of gods and heroes. Although this was no longer the case in Roman times, the theme may have retained certain esoteric connotations—and acquired others—without which it could not have found a place in the portrayal of the epiphany of the Incarnate Word. In discussing the literary treatment of divine infants in Virgil's Fourth Eclogue, in the Egyptian cult of Horus, and in the apocryphal Infancy Gospels, Eduard Norden aptly speaks of a "Bewegung des stilistischen Pendels zwischen tändelndem Spiel mit dem Knäblein und ehrfurchtsvoller Prädikation seiner Göttlichkeit."³⁶ Do not both factors also enter into the adoption of the bath scene in Byzantine art?

Actually, from a dogmatic point of view the motif was questionable.³⁷ The Child was pure, as was His Mother. *Purus pure puram aperiens vulvam quam*

³¹ G. P. Bognetti, G. Chierici, A. Capitani d'Arzago, *Santa Maria di Castelseprio* (Milan, 1948), p. 586f. and pls. 48–51. M. Lawrence (*op. cit.*, p. 330) mistakenly states that "the Child sits in the lap of the midwife."

³² Weitzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

³³ The earliest dated example of this motif in Byzantine art seems to be in the scene of the birth of the Virgin in the Menologium of Basil II (MS Vat. gr. 1613): *Codices e vaticanis selecti*, 8: *Il Menologio di Basillio II*, 2 (Turin, 1907), p. 22. Cf. also our fig. 8.

³⁴ E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 38.

³⁵ See *supra*, note 20.

³⁶ E. Norden, *Die Geburt des Kindes* (Leipzig-Berlin, 1924), p. 74.

³⁷ Cf. Didron's interesting account of a conversation on this subject with a learned monk on Mount Athos (*Manuel d'iconographie chrétienne* [Paris, 1845], p. 158, note 2).

ipse puram fecit, says Irenaeus,³⁸ and the same concept is present, at least implicitly, in the great majority of texts in which the birth of Christ is described or discussed.³⁹ Yet I do not believe that in adopting the bath motif Byzantine artists and their clerical patrons and advisers were unmindful of dogma. They adopted the motif the more emphatically to demonstrate the humanity of Christ and the reality of the Incarnation. I cannot furnish documentary proof for this interpretation, since I do not know of any Early Christian or Byzantine text referring explicitly to the bath scene.⁴⁰ But I can quote at least one Byzantine author who provides this interpretation for a closely related—and, from a dogmatic point of view, equally questionable—motif, namely, for the Virgin Mary in the Nativity being represented as fatigued by the labors of childbirth. “She lies on a mattress,” says Nicholas Mesarites in his description of the Nativity scene in the mosaics of the Church of the Holy Apostles, “... showing the face of a woman who has just been in pain—even though she escaped the pangs of labor—in order that the dispensation of the incarnation might not be looked upon with suspicion, as trickery.”⁴¹ The same reasoning undoubtedly accounts for the depiction of the Child as in need of ablution. Though born miraculously and spotless, He submits to the cares that human infants require and thus shows that the Word has indeed become flesh. Excessive heat of the bath water might hurt Him like any human baby. The more genre-like the elaboration of the theme the better, from this point of view.

Here, then, is an instance of a reinterpretation and revaluation of a Hellenistic theme in terms of specifically Christian needs and concerns.⁴² Even the

³⁸ *Adv. haer.* IV, iv, 2 (ed. by W. W. Harvey [Cambridge, 1857], II, p. 266).

³⁹ Cf., e.g., St. John Chrysostom: “... καθάραν σάρκα καὶ ἁγίαν καὶ ἁμώμον καὶ ἁμαρτία ἀπάση γεγεννημένην ἄρβατον ἐκ παρθενικῆς μήτρας ἀνέλαβεν ὁ Χριστὸς ...” (Migne, PG, 49, col. 359); “... ἀμόλυντον ἔσχε τῆς γεννήσεως τὸν τρόπον ...” (*ibid.*, 56, col. 390; for this homily, see also Ch. Martin, in *Muséon*, 54 [1941], p. 17 ff., especially pp. 39, 48 ff.). I single out these passages because of their explicitness on the subject of the purity of the Child. The bath scene, while not necessarily incompatible with this concept (especially if purity is taken exclusively in the moral sense), was hardly calculated to enhance it. While I do not know of any Byzantine writer who insists on *physical* purity as clearly as does the Latin Infancy Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (*Nulla pollutio sanguinis facta est in nascente* ...; cf. E. Amann, *Le protévangile de Jacques et ses remaniements latins* [Paris, 1910], p. 326), there can be no doubt that in general Byzantine authors also emphasized the supernatural and mysterious aspects of Christ’s birth *ex utero clauso*; cf., e.g. John of Damascus, *De fide orth.*, IV, 14 (Migne, PG, 94, col. 1161A, B); *Homilia I in dormitionem B.V.M.* (*ibid.*, 96, col. 713B). See on this subject E. Dublanchy, in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, IX, 2 (Paris, 1927), s.v. Marie, especially col. 2369 ff., and the recent papers by J. Galot (“La virginité de Marie et la naissance de Jésus,” *Nouvelle revue théologique*, 82 [1960], p. 449 ff.) and H. M. Diepen (“La virginité de Marie ‘signe du Verbe naissant,’” *Revue Thomiste*, 60 [1960], p. 425 ff.), two references which I owe to my colleague Professor Milton Anastos. Some of the early Fathers—notably Tertullian, Jerome, and to some extent Cyril of Alexandria—expressed the view that the birth of Christ took place under wholly normal conditions, but this view had long since receded by the time the scene of the bath appears in art.

⁴⁰ Didron, *op. et loc. cit.*, states that the scene figures in a legend reported by Symeon Metaphrastes, but fails to give a reference. Other scholars have repeated Didron’s statement.

⁴¹ Nikolaos Mesarites, *Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople* (G. Downey, ed.), Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, N.S., 47, pt. 6 (Philadelphia, 1957), p. 877 f. Mesarites’ description is incompletely preserved. It may well have included a reference to the bath scene, which in all probability was represented in the mosaic.

⁴² I mention only in passing the interpretation of the bath scene as an antitype of Baptism, for which I know only Western evidence; cf. a relief on the façade of St. Trophime in Arles, on which a dove is seen descending on the Child in the wash basin (fig. 9).

mundane, the playful, and the anecdotic proved valuable in this sense and thus gained a new lease on life. The very breadth of its human range made Hellenistic art a rich source of inspiration for artists striving to proclaim in visual language the fact that God has become Man. Undoubtedly here lies one of the keys to the power of the Hellenistic tradition in Byzantine art in general. If at times Hellenistic motifs that are retained or revived may seem paradoxical—or even faintly ludicrous—it is not for lack of meaning, but rather because of the solemnity, the weight of the new message with which they are invested.

Certain basic concepts and categories which have emerged from this analysis will be useful in considering other aspects of the Hellenistic heritage. Survival and revival, and particularly also the grafting of a revival on a surviving tradition—these are phenomena familiar in many areas of Byzantine art, though they are not always demonstrable as clearly as in this instance. Mythological and Old Testament subjects stand out as carriers of the Hellenistic survival again and again. And the distinction between a natural continuation or resumption of Hellenistic elements in the context of Christian religious art, on the one hand, and a revaluation and re-elaboration of such elements in the light of new meanings and new purposes, on the other—this distinction, too, will be found to be of larger significance. Not that I intend to construct from these categories a rigid framework into which to press all available material. Rather, may they serve as guide posts in our further investigations.

Consider *landscape painting*, for instance, which is one of the most important and most characteristic fields of endeavor of Hellenistic artists. The extent to which Byzantine artists made use of the ancient repertory of idyllic groves and running brooks, sunlit cliffs and soaring mountains, solitary porches and columns and picturesquely complex villa structures as settings for religious subjects is familiar to all (fig. 10). Yet, even in its most elaborate confections of this sort, Byzantine art does not achieve the sense of nature heroically animated, romantically unified, and pantheistically hallowed, which was the original *raison d'être* of these motifs. The imitation remains labored and self-conscious. It could hardly be otherwise given the fact that the emotional, religious, and philosophic trends to which these artistic forms responded had long since spent themselves. The wonder is that so much of the artistic tradition survived in spite of this.

Perhaps I should qualify the negative statement I have just made by a reference to the frescoes of Castelseprio. This is one instance where a Byzantine artist not only uses motifs from Hellenistic landscape painting, but succeeds in evoking a sense of nature gently enveloping the human action. Here, as nowhere else in Byzantine art, the Gospel story is endowed with a poetic, dreamlike quality (fig. 12). But Castelseprio is an exception and I strongly suspect was an exception in its own time. For, in general, it was much more in the illustration of the Old Testament, rather than of the Gospel story, that

the repertory of Hellenistic landscape painting survived at all. The fact is striking and has been observed repeatedly. Whether we think of the fifth-century mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore, the illuminated purple codices of the sixth century, the wall paintings of about 700 in the chancel of S. Maria Antiqua, or the splendidly illuminated manuscripts of the Macedonian era—it is usually the Old Testament subjects that provide an opportunity to develop outdoor settings with a greater or lesser amount of Hellenistic motifs, while the events from the Gospels tend to be displayed against a more neutral and abstract foil.⁴³

This, of course, is simply another aspect of a phenomenon already referred to. Old Testament illustration again is seen to be a carrier of the Hellenistic tradition. But we may use this aspect to probe a little more deeply the reasons for the phenomenon. In part, surely, these reasons are simply historical. Old Testament iconography was developed, and to some extent codified, before Gospel iconography was, and probably at a time when Hellenistic standards of narrative depiction were still universally practiced.⁴⁴ It is safe to say this without going into controversial questions of the chronology and morphology of early Bible illustration, and more particularly of the extent and nature of its roots in the art of Hellenistic Judaism. A certain amount of landscape setting came to be traditionally and conventionally accepted as a normal garb for Old Testament subjects.

But while this is part of the explanation, it cannot be the whole. It does not suffice to account for the renewed elaboration of these settings, particularly in the art of the “renaissance” periods (first the Macedonian and subsequently also the Palaeologan).⁴⁵ Above all, it does not suffice to explain the extension of the use of this type of setting to other sectors of Byzantine religious art, a striking example being the imperial menologia of the tenth century, in which the same kinds of scenery appear as backdrops for drastic and gory depictions of the tortures and executions of Christian martyrs (fig. 11). Clearly these settings must have carried certain specific connotations. It is well here to recall the ancient association of idyllic landscapes with mythological themes.⁴⁶ Was it perhaps a half-remembered association with the heroic life—rather than the poetic and idyllic quality of the settings which, as we have said, usually gets lost in any case—that gave a special meaning and function to

⁴³ E. Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Period between Justinian and Iconoclasm*, Berichte zum XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongress, IV, 1 (Munich, 1958), pp. 36f., 39. So far as the wall paintings in Sta. Maria Antiqua are concerned, I agree with P. J. Nordhagen (“The earliest decorations in Santa Maria Antiqua and their date,” *Institutum Romanum Norvegiae: Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia*, I [1962], p. 53ff., especially p. 67f.) that the epigraphic evidence is in favor of the Old Testament scenes on the transennae being of the same date as the New Testament scenes on the chancel walls which are part of the decoration of Pope John VII (705–7). I pointed this out in 1934 and discussed the transennae paintings in connection with the work of John VII, but found the undeniable stylistic discrepancy between the two groups of scenes difficult to explain. Considered in terms of a generic distinction between Old and New Testament scenes, the discrepancy becomes intelligible.

⁴⁴ See p. 36f. of my paper in the Acts of the Munich Congress quoted in the preceding footnote.

⁴⁵ G. Millet, in *Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (1938), p. 195f.

⁴⁶ Hanfmann, p. 88f. and figs. 21, 22, 24.

the landscape backgrounds in Byzantine art?⁴⁷ And was the very fact of a traditional association with "secular biography," with a life story epically unfolding in time and space, a barrier to a more frequent and whole-hearted adoption of the landscape repertory in the most sacred sphere, namely, that of Gospel iconography? All this must necessarily remain speculation, in the absence of clear-cut evidence regarding the meaning—and possible revaluation—of this particular part of the Hellenistic heritage in Byzantine art. Of that heritage the landscape settings surely are one of the most curious and puzzling elements.

I turn to an aspect of Hellenistic painting highly relevant to these idyllic and romantic landscapes but of much wider scope and application, namely, the quality often referred to as *illusionism*. The term denotes a technique which by purely pictorial means—by color, shades, and high lights—produces an illusion of three-dimensional shapes and, at the same time, suffuses these shapes with light and suggests their envelopment in "real" space. That Byzantine painting owes much to this aspect of Hellenism is generally recognized. But, again, there is the question of the exact role and meaning of this heritage.

At the very least, Byzantine painting owed to this tradition some of its flexibility as a visual language. In all centuries from the fourth to the fifteenth one finds innumerable instances in which high lights and shades help to convey an impression of physical presence, of movement, and sometimes of inner life as well. However routinely this pictorial language may be handled, however trite and worn-out its formulae may have become, it was an essential prerequisite for making of art—and painting in particular—the highly articulate instrument for complex and increasingly differentiated messages which it was in the hands of the Byzantine church and the Byzantine state. Much of the abiding appeal which Byzantine painting had for the Latin West also is due to this quality.

⁴⁷ H. Kenner's attempt to relate the background sceneries of the Vatican Menologium more specifically to classical stage sets (*Das Theater und der Realismus in der griechischen Kunst* [Vienna, 1954], p. 122 ff.) has encountered serious opposition (cf. the reviews by C. Fensterbusch in *Anzeiger für die Altertumswissenschaft*, 12 [1959], col. 95 ff. and A. von Gerkan in *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen*, 210 [1956], p. 162 ff.). Theatrical affiliations have been claimed on more solid grounds for the architectural backdrops frequently found in Byzantine portraits of evangelists (A. M. Friend, Jr., "The Portraits of the Evangelists in Greek and Latin Manuscripts," Part II, *Art Studies*, 7 [1929], p. 3 ff., especially p. 9 ff.). It is true that this problem also requires re-examination, particularly in the light of P. W. Lehmann's observations on the Boscoreale paintings which are crucial for this interpretation (*Roman Wall Paintings from Boscoreale in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* [Cambridge, 1953], p. 90 ff.). But Mrs. Lehmann may well have gone too far in denying categorically that the Boscoreale paintings have anything to do with stage sceneries (see the review by M. Bieber in *American Journal of Archaeology*, 57 [1953], p. 239; for stage sets, see also Hanfmann, p. 88 f. and fig. 26). Granted, however, that the architectural backdrops of portraits of evangelists may have theatrical connotations, it must be remembered, a propos of Friend's interpretation, that such backdrops appear in Byzantine art not only in connection with authors and literary men. Martyrs, too, may be provided with fantastic architectural settings, witness, aside from the Menologium, the mosaics of H. Georgios in Salonika. These latter likewise have been thought to have, *inter alia*, theatrical associations (H. Torp, "Quelques remarques sur les mosaïques de l'église Saint-Georges à Thessalonique," *Acts of the Ninth International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Salonika, 12-19 April, 1953* [= *Hellenika, Parartema*, 9 (Athens, 1955)], I, p. 489 ff., especially p. 495).

But illusionism in Hellenistic art meant more than the creation of optically convincing images. It meant the creation of a dream world. Glowing colors and shimmering lights not only give shape and heightened life to figures and objects, but often also dissolve them and make them transparent. The real hallmark of Hellenistic illusionism (as of nineteenth-century impressionism) is its ambivalence: it enhances and, at the same time, transfigures reality.⁴⁸

That this is an important element in Byzantine painting also will be generally agreed. In the best of the seventh-century frescoes in S. Maria Antiqua, in which the techniques of Hellenistic illusionism are handled with surprising mastery, figures are lifelike yet insubstantial (fig. 13). The same is true of the frescoes of Castelseprio (figs. 12, 14). Indeed, the blending of plausibility and elusiveness is the very essence of these remarkable paintings. Figures are alive and humanly convincing, but move in an airy and luminous world utterly beyond our grasp. On an earlier occasion I have drawn attention to instances where *angels* are singled out for a particularly bold and striking display of illusionistic technique. The frescoes of S. Maria Antiqua and the encaustic icon of the Virgin on Mount Sinai afford examples of this. I have suggested that illusionism in these instances may have been a means of characterizing angels as spiritual beings, as *ἀσώματοι*.⁴⁹ However this may be, illusionism in Byzantine painting certainly was much more than a convenient idiom—let alone just a mechanically repeated technique. It was a positive aesthetic element deeply tied to new spiritual values and content. Here, in fact, is a prime example of Byzantium appropriating a segment of the Hellenistic heritage for its own particular purposes, investing it with a new meaning and a new mission; reevaluating it, in other words, and, we must add, developing it in the process. For the web of high lights that ultimately emerges and spins a subtle pattern over surfaces of paintings and mosaics is far removed from anything the classical age had known. It becomes a kind of grid or armature for figures or even for entire panels.⁵⁰ Most literally is this true in the case of enamels where the metal cloisons containing the colored glass mass are an armature in the technical sense, but may indicate high lights at the same time.⁵¹ However, the clearest proof that in the Byzantine aesthetic scheme these high lights have become a new aesthetic value is the fact that they are so frequently rendered in gold; and not only in enamels, where gold is the metal normally employed, but in paintings and mosaics as well.⁵² Gold, of course, had many different uses in Byzantine art, and a discussion of all these uses and their relationships to classical or other antecedents would lead us far afield. Suffice it to say that so far as gold high lights are concerned, I find no clear-cut

⁴⁸ Hanfmann, p. 89 ff.

⁴⁹ See my paper in the Acts of the Munich Congress (*supra*, note 43), p. 47; also C. Bertelli, *La Madonna di Santa Maria in Trastevere* (Rome, 1961), p. 31 f.

⁵⁰ This quality cannot be conveyed adequately in black and white illustrations; see color reproductions such as those on pp. 157 and 191 of A. Grabar, *Byzantine Painting* (Geneva, 1953), or pp. 69, 71, 73, 75, 77 of D. Talbot Rice, *The Art of Byzantium* (London, 1959).

⁵¹ Grabar, *op. cit.*, p. 188 f.; Rice, *op. cit.*, pp. 25, 33, 49.

⁵² Grabar, *op. cit.*, pp. 53 (high lights on rocks and plants), 113, 117 (high lights on rocks and plants), 158, 174, 177; Rice, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

examples earlier than the fourth century A.D.⁵³ It was then—at the beginning of the Byzantine era—that figures and objects first appeared suffused with gold as though bathed in a light that is not of this world. The full aesthetic potential of the device, however, was realized subsequently in mature Byzantine art, when webs of gold utterly transfigure those whom they invest.⁵⁴

The last aspect of Hellenistic art discussed by Professor Hanfmann is the *expression of emotions and mental states*, a sphere in which that art had particularly excelled. Exploring to a degree never previously attained in the visual arts the potentialities of pose, gesture, and, most particularly, facial expression, Hellenistic sculptors and painters had vastly increased the range, variety and, above all, intensity of the emotions displayed by human figures. How much of this achievement was retained and perpetuated in Byzantine art and what was its role?

This may not appear to be a very promising line of enquiry. Many Byzantine pictorial representations are totally unresponsive when approached from the point of view of the artist's concern with the emotional experiences of the figures portrayed. Even representations of moments of high drama—moments in the relating of which the biblical text itself describes the psychological reactions of those involved—may be found sadly wanting in this respect (fig. 17). In other instances, one is painfully aware of an originally meaningful pose or gesture having been drained of all genuine feeling through endless repetition. Thus, the butler and the baker, who in the prison scene of the Vienna Genesis (fig. 15) display their reactions most violently as Joseph foretells them their respective fates, reappear in the corresponding scenes in the Byzantine Octateuchs as lame replicas of their former selves (fig. 16). No doubt, lack of empathy is one of the reasons for the low esteem in which Byzantine art was held during periods which sought in the pictorial arts an adequate portrayal above all of a full range of human sentiments. Today we tend to lean too much toward the other extreme and to exclude this as a valid criterion altogether.

The descriptions of paintings in the Byzantine ekphraseis show that such total exclusion is not justified. Art historians look upon these texts mainly as a source of information regarding the iconography of important monuments now lost, and tend to ignore the emphasis that is so often placed on the emo-

⁵³ W. F. Volbach, *Frühchristliche Kunst* (Munich, 1958), pl. 130 (mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana; note the clouds, the rock of Golgotha and the roof tiles, though the latter may be meant to be materially golden).

⁵⁴ The concept of "Eigenlicht," in which W. Schöne (*Über das Licht in der Malerei* [Berlin, 1954]) sees the key to an understanding of the role played by light in Christian and mediaeval painting from the fifth century on (see especially pp. 20ff., 49f.), does not entirely fit the phenomenon of these gold high lights which are so striking a feature of Byzantine painting. Though strongly ornamentalized, they retain something of the character of what Schöne calls "Fremdlicht" (cf. p. 27f.); that is to say, they are reflections, but reflections of an unearthly light. On the relevant metaphysical concepts and their development in Hellenistic and Christian thought, see the summary statement, *ibid.*, p. 55f., and especially R. Bultmann, "Zur Geschichte der Lichtsymbolik im Altertum," *Philologus*, 97 (1948), p. 1ff.

tional element in the figures and scenes described.⁵⁵ To be sure, such passages usually are shot through with *topoi*, literary conceits and clichés inherited from classical times;⁵⁶ but at the very least they bespeak an abiding interest in emotional and psychological expression and some of them are clearly based on actual observation.⁵⁷ Similarly in art, ancient formulae are carried along in fossilized form but have an uncanny way of becoming revived and of being filled anew with emotional content. It is, in effect, the same process of "revival on the basis of survival" which we have encountered before in considering other aspects of Byzantine art.

So much, in a general way, for the legitimacy of an enquiry into emotional expressions. In an attempt to assess more specifically the Hellenistic heritage in this sphere, one soon becomes aware of certain limitations. For one thing, the range of emotions that find expression—even fossilized expression—in Byzantine art is, on the whole, much reduced compared with Hellenistic art. I feel fairly safe, for instance, in asserting that in all Byzantine painting and sculpture there is not a single laughing figure. When one considers the popularity of such figures in Hellenistic art one realizes again that the survival of the ancient heritage was far from automatic. Probably the widest range of emotions that can be found anywhere in Byzantine art is in the miniatures of the Vienna Genesis. By any standards—not only Byzantine, but even classical, or, for that matter, modern—the illuminators of this famous manuscript were quite exceptionally successful in portraying with great poignancy a wide variety of psychological situations.⁵⁸ In the matter of psychological insight they outstripped by far most of the works that commonly figure in the discussion of their supposed sources, works such as the illuminated papyri and the bulk of late classical mythological representations. However important the role of such models may have been, here is a case—quite early in the history of Byzantine art—where one must reckon with real empathy interven-

⁵⁵ Among the most interesting texts from this point of view are the description of scenes of the martyrdom of St. Euphemia by Asterius of Amasia (Migne, PG, 40, col. 336f.); the description of scenes from the life of Christ at St. Sergius in Gaza by Choricus (*Laud. Marc.*, I, 47 ff.; *Choricii Gazaei opera*, edd. R. Foerster and E. Richtsteig [Leipzig, 1929], p. 14 ff.); Photius' Homily XVII on an image of the Virgin and Child in St. Sophia (C. Mango, *The Homilies of Photius* [Cambridge, Mass., 1958], p. 279 ff., especially p. 290); the homilies by Leo VI describing pictures in the churches of Kauleas and Stylianos Zaoutzes (A. Frolow, in *Études byzantines*, 3 [1945], p. 43 ff., especially pp. 47, 52 f.); and the descriptions of the mosaics of the Church of the Holy Apostles by Constantine of Rhodes (E. Legrand, in *Revue des études grecques*, 9 [1896], p. 32 ff., especially p. 58 ff.) and Nicholas Mesarites (Downey, *op. cit.*; see *supra*, note 41).

⁵⁶ On this subject, see the remarks by C. Mango in his paper published in the present volume; especially p. 65 ff.

⁵⁷ This must be true, for instance, of Mesarites' description of the fatigued Virgin in the Nativity scene which was quoted *supra* (see also *infra*, p. 114 and fig. 12). The author could hardly have made a point of the contrast between this representation and the painlessness of the actual birth unless he had observed the expression of the figure. Choricus, centuries earlier, had similarly used actual observation in describing the Virgin of the Nativity at St. Sergius in Gaza, but only to find an absence of fatigue, a trait which he relates to the miraculous nature of the birth (*Laud. Marc.*, I, 51 f.; *op. cit.*, p. 15 f.). The intermingling of *topoi* and direct (indeed, sometimes highly sensitive) aesthetic observations was recognized long ago as a characteristic of certain architectural descriptions in Byzantine ekphraseis (O. Wulff, "Das Raumerlebnis des Naos im Spiegel der Ekphrasis," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 30 [1929-30], p. 531 ff.) and applies equally to certain descriptions of pictorial representations.

⁵⁸ H. Gerstinger, *Die Wiener Genesis* (Vienna, 1931), p. 172 f.

ing in the copying process on a considerable scale. The same is true, if to a lesser extent, of certain other narrative cycles, not only of this period but of some other periods as well.⁵⁹ But, by and large, the emotional and psychological range in Byzantine art is rather restricted. Its most important sector is the expression of grief and pain, and this is the area where the role of the Hellenistic influence can be most readily seen. But additional limitations also become apparent here.

The essence of the Hellenistic portrayal of emotion was that it was not only emphatic, but at the same time grandiose, noble, and beautiful even when expressing adversity. This combination is rare in Byzantine art. When Christian art, after its laconic and sternly inexpressive late-antique beginnings, first introduced a measure of empathy, it used for the expression of grief facial distortions that are, to be sure, ultimately of Hellenistic origin, but the figures as a whole totally lack the Hellenistic pathos (figs. 18, 19). Here, if anywhere, it is important to bear in mind that Byzantine artists had far less contact with true Hellenistic art than with a Graeco-Roman *koinē*; a distinction, which in this instance means the difference between the heroic, noble, or poetic, and something that can best be described as drastic.⁶⁰ This epithet also applies to the far more emphatic display of grief in the Vienna Genesis (fig. 24). The emphasis is soon reduced, particularly in scenes depicting the mourning over Christ and the Virgin (figs. 20, 21); but what emerges then—especially in the so-called Second Golden Age of Byzantine art (fig. 22)—is a restrained and lyrical mood that has more affinity with the art of the fourth century B.C. (fig. 23) than with characteristically Hellenistic art. Thus, in a sense, the Hellenistic phase is by-passed, or, perhaps one should say, transcended.

This is an extremely important point. Not only does it serve to illustrate the limitations of the influence of the Hellenistic heritage, but it also illuminates in a broader sense the relationship of Byzantine art to the whole of the classical past. The Hellenic ultimately is more important than the Hellenistic.⁶¹ In calling to mind the art of the fourth century B.C. I have, however, advisedly spoken of an affinity and have avoided the term influence. For the restrained lyricism which emerges is an autonomous growth within Byzantine art and is not, or at least not primarily, a result of copying from ancient Greek works. It is distilled from the heritage of Graeco-Roman art, and here again, so it would seem, the tradition of Old Testament illustrations plays an important part as an intermediary or carrier. The *Koimesis*, for instance, as it becomes tangible in the art of the Macedonian and Comnenian periods (fig. 25), is surely an adaptation—a toned down adaptation—of a death scene such as those we find in the Vienna Genesis (fig. 24). How methodical and purposeful the

⁵⁹ Cf., e.g., the Chludoff Psalter and other Byzantine psalters with marginal illustrations.

⁶⁰ Cf. Hanfmann, p. 93 and fig. 40.

⁶¹ Cf. the similar conclusions of Weidle in his paper quoted *supra*, note 8; see especially pp. 415, 419. Weidle also stresses the fact that this Hellenism is an autonomous growth in Byzantium and he shows that it is distilled from, rather than present in, the famous "renaissance" products of the Macedonian era. But he gives too one-sided a picture of Byzantine art, minimizing, as he does, the importance of those "narrative and illustrative" elements which are present nevertheless and which are a lasting heritage from the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

adaptation was can be seen from the fact that in subjects outside the most sacred sphere of Christ and the Virgin *more* of the drastic gesticulation of the kind found in the Vienna Genesis survives. The mourning parents at the deathbed of St. Gorgonia, the sister of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, as depicted in the famous Paris Codex of St. Gregory's Homilies (fig. 27), make an interesting comparison in this respect with the figure of the mourning Virgin in the same manuscript (fig. 26).⁶² As late as the thirteenth century, in the frescoes of Sopočani, grief is much more emphatically expressed at the deathbed of Jacob (fig. 29) and of Queen Anne Dandolo than at that of the Virgin (figs. 28, 35).⁶³ The distinction is reflected also in the ekphraseis which stress the point that too excessive a display of grief is not appropriate to sacred figures.⁶⁴ The tender, lyrical mood which Byzantine art reserves for the most exalted expressions of grief and pain is of its own making and is rooted deeply in Byzantine religious mentality. Parenthetically, I may refer here to the emergence of the same kind of specifically Byzantine lyricism in another emotional sphere, the sphere of motherly affection. The image of the Tender Virgin in which this theme finds its most perfect expression (fig. 31) has certain antecedents in genre-like Hellenistic representations.⁶⁵ But here again the ethos is wholly new and the pensive, introspective mood which informs the image is more akin to that of works of the fourth century B.C. (fig. 23) than to anything characteristically Hellenistic.

Having recognized this basic autonomy of Byzantine emotional expression, let us now consider instances of a return to, or borrowing from, Hellenistic art—for there are such instances, especially in the middle and late Byzantine periods. In an interesting recent study of the early history of the iconography of the Threnos—the Lamentation over the dead Christ as a separate scene—Kurt Weitzmann has suggested that the scene was developed under the influence of Roman (but ultimately Hellenistic) representations of the mourning of Actaeon.⁶⁶ I am not sure that this is an altogether cogent case, for almost every stage in the development so convincingly traced by Weitzmann can be accounted for through *internal* borrowings, especially from scenes of the Koimesis⁶⁷ and the Deposition.⁶⁸ Such internal borrowing also plays a part in another scene of pain and grief discussed by Weitzmann, the tenth-century ivory in Berlin depicting the death of the Forty Martyrs.⁶⁹ I entirely agree that some of the poses in this highly agitated scene must have been borrowed—rather incongruously—from an Ascension.⁷⁰ But here I also

⁶² Omont, *op. cit.* (*supra*, note 11), pls. 21, 23.

⁶³ G. Millet, *La peinture du moyen âge en Yougoslavie* (A. Frolov, ed.), II (Paris, 1957), pls. 19–21; 27, 2; 47.

⁶⁴ Cf. Mesarites on the figure of Christ in the Raising of Lazarus in the Church of the Holy Apostles (Downey, *op. cit.*, pp. 880, 907); see also Weidle, *op. cit.*, p. 417f.

⁶⁵ *Supra*, note 14 and Hanfmann, p. 86.

⁶⁶ K. Weitzmann, "The Origin of the Threnos," *De artibus opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky* (New York, 1961), p. 476ff., especially p. 487ff.

⁶⁷ The Koimesis is recognized as an important source also by Weitzmann (*ibid.*, p. 483ff.).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 486.

⁶⁹ See *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 14 (1960), p. 64ff. and fig. 38.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, fig. 34.

agree with Weitzmann that at least one group in the crowd of sufferers is modelled on a Hellenistic motif and must be considered an instance of a genuine revival. The comparison which Weitzmann has made with the Pan and Eros group in Naples⁷¹ is wholly convincing, and I would only question, in the light of these examples, that Byzantine artists in their borrowings were particularly mindful of the original meanings of the motifs they used.⁷² I cite another and much earlier example of an incongruous use of a Hellenistic motif, namely, the scene of the Massacre of the Innocents on one of the late fifth-century book covers in Milan Cathedral (fig. 32). The mothers witnessing the slaughter of their babies are here shown not merely with their arms thrust upward—which is a normal and conventional way of expressing despair (cf. figs. 19, 24, 29)—but, in addition, executing a kind of dance step strongly reminiscent of a dancing maenad (cf. fig. 33). It would seem that long before the days of the Italian Renaissance Christian artists discovered that figures of frenzied Bacchantes could serve to express emotions quite different from those originally conveyed by such figures, or—to quote Sir Joshua Reynolds—“that the extremes of contrary passions are with little variation expressed by the same action.”⁷³

Perhaps it is in the renewed increase of facial expressions, which gradually takes place in the depiction of mourning figures from the eleventh century on, that Hellenistic antecedents are most clearly in evidence. The Lamentation scene at Nerezi (1164 A.D.) is a famous example (fig. 30). Although there is here more of the “drastic” expression of grief of Roman times than of heroic suffering as seen in truly Hellenistic art, the same cannot be said of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century works in which this development culminates (fig. 35). In these the play of facial muscles does attain something of the grandiose scale that we associate with Pergamon (fig. 36). To what extent this is once again a case of an internal development resulting in an inner affinity with Greek antecedents of long ago, or what actual inspiration from ancient sources there may have been—is a question which must be left open.

I must confine myself to these few observations on the relationship of Byzantine representations of pain and grief to Hellenistic antecedents. But a few additional remarks on the role of emotional displays in Byzantine art are in order.

The expression of pain and grief and of certain other emotions was one of those aspects of ancient art for which Christian religious subject matter offered a natural field of survival and revival. As I have pointed out, however, Byzantine artists were far from taking advantage of all the opportunities thus offered. The case is perhaps somewhat parallel to what we found earlier in regard to certain genre motifs. Like the latter, the expression of emotions became a concern of artists at particular stages in the Byzantine development and may have served not simply to humanize the Gospel story, as is often

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, fig. 40.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁷³ E. W [ind] and F. Antal, “The Maenad Under the Cross,” *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 1 (1937–8), p. 70ff. I owe this reference to Professor Ernst Gombrich.

said, but in a very precise sense to bring home the reality of Christ's life on earth, the reality of the Incarnation. I refer once more to the passage in Mesarites in which the fatigue displayed by the Virgin of the Nativity—and there are many Byzantine representations of the subject in which fatigue is expressed, if not in the young Mother's face, certainly in her pose (fig. 12)—is interpreted in this sense.⁷⁴ Yet this cannot be the whole explanation. Byzantine artists' interest in the ancient repertory of poses, gestures, and facial expressions ultimately goes beyond both mere illustration and the service of a religious doctrine however central and sacred. The repertory in and by itself must have had meaning for them, a meaning perhaps best defined by the term "life force," the *vis vitalis* of which Professor Hanfmann has spoken.⁷⁵ How else, for instance, is one to explain the disjointed use and seemingly arbitrary combination of single figures or groups from that repertory on the ivory caskets of the middle Byzantine period (fig. 34)?⁷⁶ The carvers of these little reliefs had a preference for agitated and expressive poses, and it is interesting to note that many of their figures derive from Old Testament and mythological representations. The role of such representations as carriers and compendia of the ancient pictorial types stands out particularly clearly here. But so does the fact that these types had an appeal quite aside from their subject content, and regardless also of any new cause they might be made to serve. They have acquired a life of their own. One is reminded here of Aby Warburg's concept of the "Pathosformel," a concept that did so much to clarify our understanding of the art of the Italian Quattrocento in its relation to classical antiquity.⁷⁷ Something of the same quest for "enhanced bodily and emotional expression"⁷⁸ as a value in its own right—a quest which Warburg found to be the mainspring of the Renaissance artists' interest in ancient figure types—was operative in Byzantium also. The intensity of the quest varied at different times and found outlets not only in poses and gestures but also, to paraphrase another Warburgian term, in a "rhetoric of wrinkles" and in a "rhetoric of draperies" (figs. 37, 38).⁷⁹ All these tend to become absolute values divorced from any specific motivation or content.⁸⁰ And thus they reveal something of the deeper and more elusive ties that connect Byzantine with ancient Greek art, and with Hellenistic art in particular. Byzantium never entirely ceased to respond to the life force that animates all Greek art

⁷⁴ See *supra*, p. 104. For the pose and its Hellenistic antecedents, see Hanfmann, p. 92.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁷⁶ A. Goldschmidt and K. Weitzmann, *Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen*, I: *Die Kästen* (Berlin, 1930), p. 13 ff.

⁷⁷ A. Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leipzig-Berlin, 1932), index, s.v. "Pathosstil"; see especially vol. I, pp. 157, 173; vol. II, p. 443 ff. Cf. E. Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm, 1960), p. 153: "There is no adequate translation for Warburg's indispensable term."

⁷⁸ Warburg, *op. cit.*, II, p. 447.

⁷⁹ Cf. Warburg's "Muskelrhetorik" (*ibid.*).

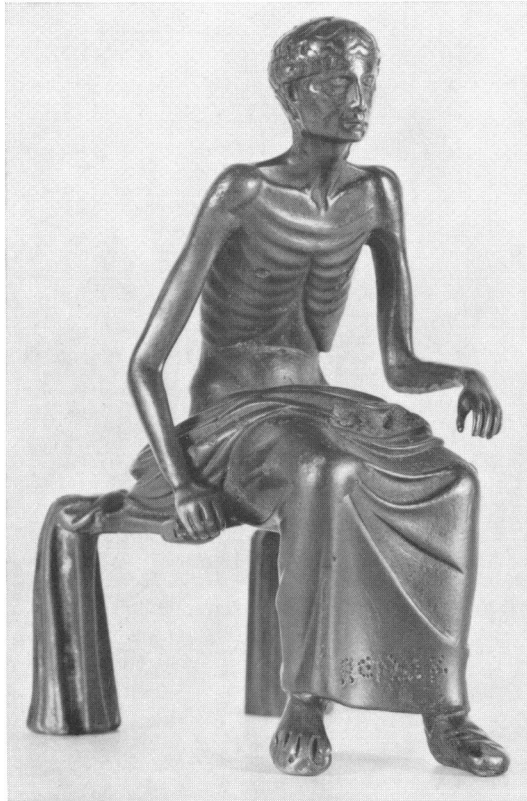
⁸⁰ The billowing veil of the nurse who helps to guide the infant Virgin's first steps in the mosaic of the Kariye Djami is a characteristic example of a "rhetorical" drapery motif lacking motivation in the context in which it is used. For the significance of the motif in ancient art, see F. Matz, *Der Gott auf dem Elefantenwagen*, Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz, Abhandlungen der geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse (1952), no. 10 (Wiesbaden, 1953), p. 725 ff.

and that had found its most varied and emphatic expressions during the Hellenistic period.

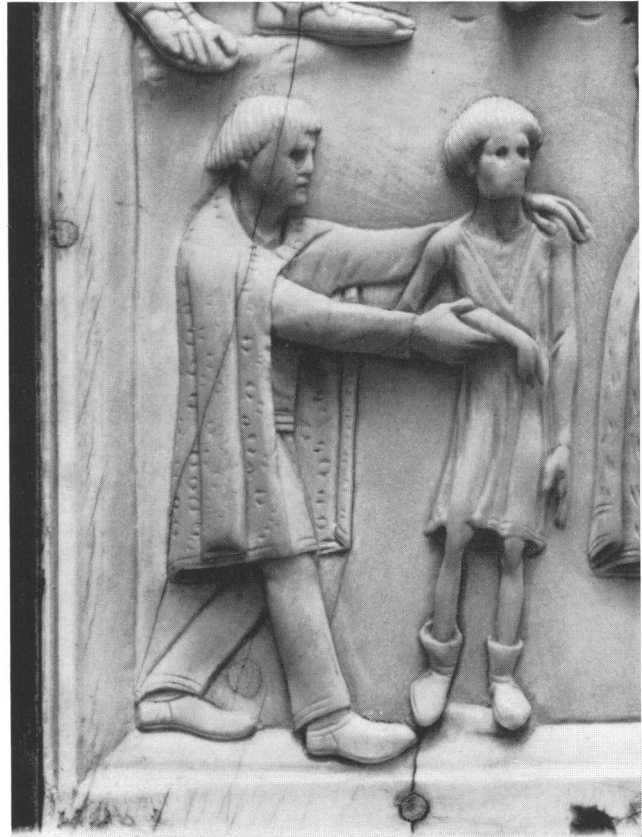
We conclude that the Hellenistic heritage in Byzantine art is neither a dead ballast mechanically carried along by unthinking, robot-like craftsmen, generation after generation, through eleven hundred years, nor a collection of curios unearthed and refurbished from time to time to satisfy an antiquarian bent. There is a definite rationale in what does and what does not survive, in what is and what is not revived during the various "renaissance" phases. In particular, many of the paradoxical aspects seemingly inherent in the use of the Hellenistic heritage for the purposes of religious art disappear upon closer study. Christian art offered a natural scope for a number of characteristic forms and themes developed in Hellenistic times. Many such forms and themes proved adaptable to serve new causes and to express specifically Christian concerns. Ultimately, however, the strength and nature of the heritage cannot be explained or understood unless one also recognizes that there were still operative in Byzantium impulses from that same life force that had shaped Hellenistic art many centuries earlier.

This life force also helps to account for the peculiar relationship between survivals and revivals which we have encountered. The seemingly fossilized forms that were carried along through the centuries were not quite so dried up as they often appear to be. Nor, on the other hand, were the revivals, the returns to the ancient sources, as sudden or as comprehensive as is sometimes claimed. Old Testament and, to some extent, mythological imagery were particularly important as agents of continuity. The whole problem perhaps can best be summed up by invoking the simile of the "sleeping embers which will rise in flames"—from time to time.

Lest I be accused of overemphasizing the Hellenistic element in Byzantine art, let me close with two reminders. First, I want to stress once more the importance of Roman art, which formed both a link and a barrier between Hellenistic and Byzantine art. Rome had preceded Byzantium in applying processes of selection and reinterpretation to the Hellenistic heritage, though it was instrumental also in preserving and transmitting a measure of the Hellenistic *vis vitalis*. Second, it is essential to maintain a sense of proportion and to realize that even in the aggregate the Hellenistic survivals and revivals in Byzantine art involve only a fraction of the Hellenistic achievement. Let us remind ourselves once more of an obvious fact which my selective approach may have tended to obscure, namely, that Byzantine art, viewed as a whole, has a focus, an orientation totally different from Hellenistic art. Only fragments are inherited, and these fragments are transformed, transfigured, and transcended in the service of Byzantium's own aesthetic ideal; or, perhaps one should say, polarized by two powerful magnets which shaped that ideal: the mediaeval and the essentially classical.



1. Washington, Dumbarton Oaks.
Bronze Statuette of an Emaciated Man



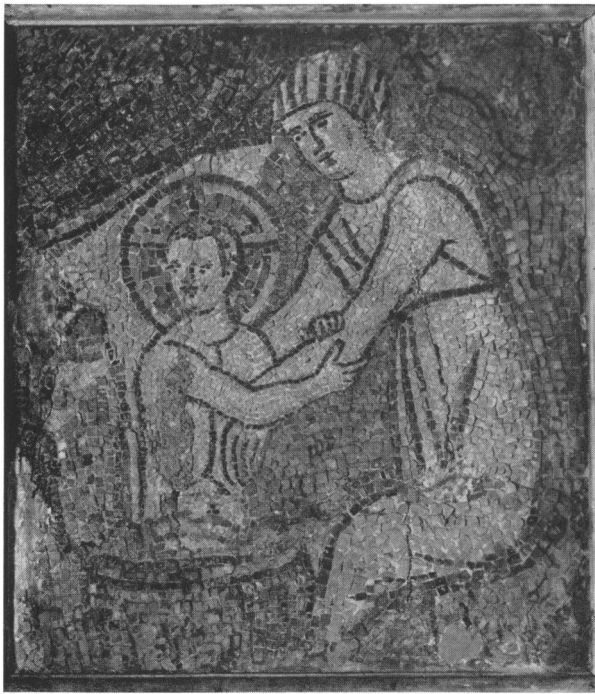
2. Florence, National Museum. Ivory Diptych,
detail: Sick Man Brought before St. Paul



3. Venice, S. Marco, Atrium.
Mosaic of the Birth of Ishmael



4. Paris, Louvre. Textile from Antinoë, detail:
Bath of the Infant Dionysus



5. Rome, St. Peter's. Fragment of Mosaic from Oratory of Pope John VII: Bath of the Infant Christ



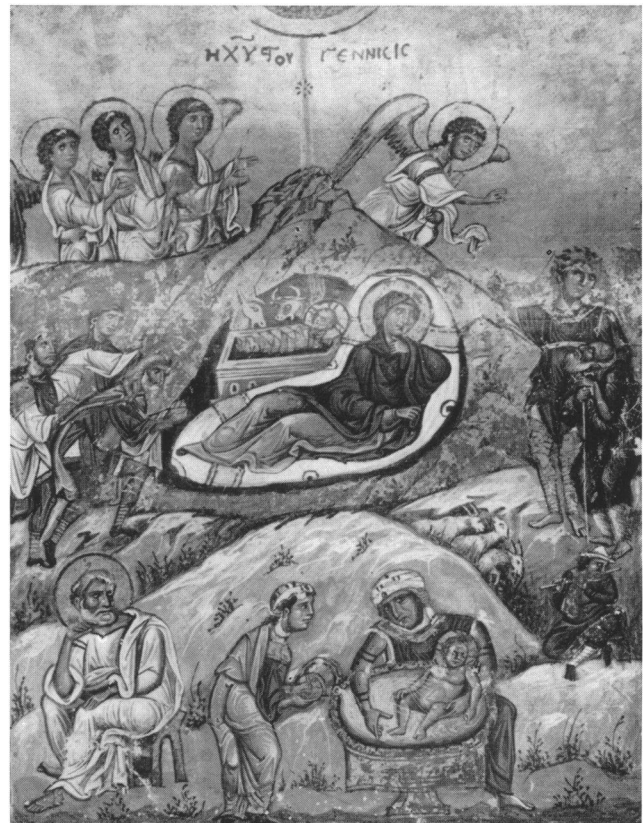
6. Beirut, Museum. Mosaic from Baalbek, detail: Bath of the Infant Alexander



7. Naples, Museum. Silver Cup from the Casa del Menandro at Pompeii, detail: Bath of the Infant Dionysus



9. Arles, St. Trophime. Detail of Portal Sculpture: Bath of the Infant Christ



8. Mount Athos, Lavra, Skeuophylakion. Lectionary, f. 114^v: Nativity



10. Paris, National Library. MS gr. 139, fol. 1^v: David as Harpist



11. Vatican Library. MS gr. 1613, p. 246: Martyrdom of St. Eleutherius



12. Castelseprio, S. Maria foris Portas. Wall Painting of the Nativity



13. Rome, S. Maria Antiqua. Wall Painting of the Maccabees



14. Castelseprio, S. Maria foris Portas. Wall Painting of the Dream of Joseph, detail



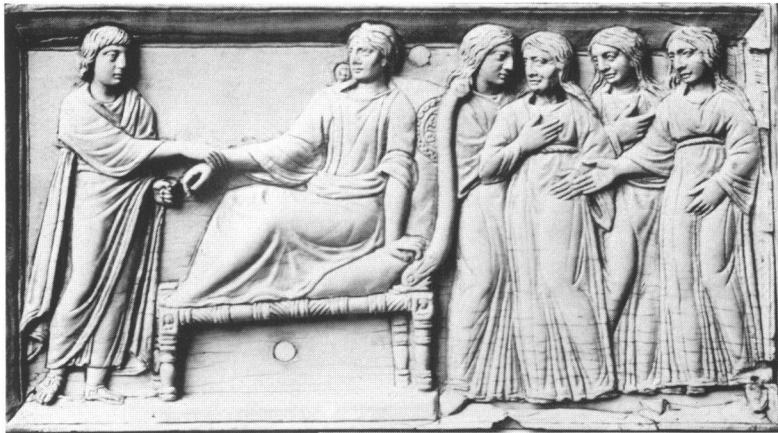
15. Vienna, National Library. MS Theol. gr. 31, p. 33:
Joseph in Prison



16. Vatican Library. MS gr. 746, fol. 122v:
Joseph in Prison



17. Monreale, Cathedral. Mosaic of the Last Supper



18. Brescia, Museo Civico. Ivory Casket, detail:
Raising of the Daughter of Jairus



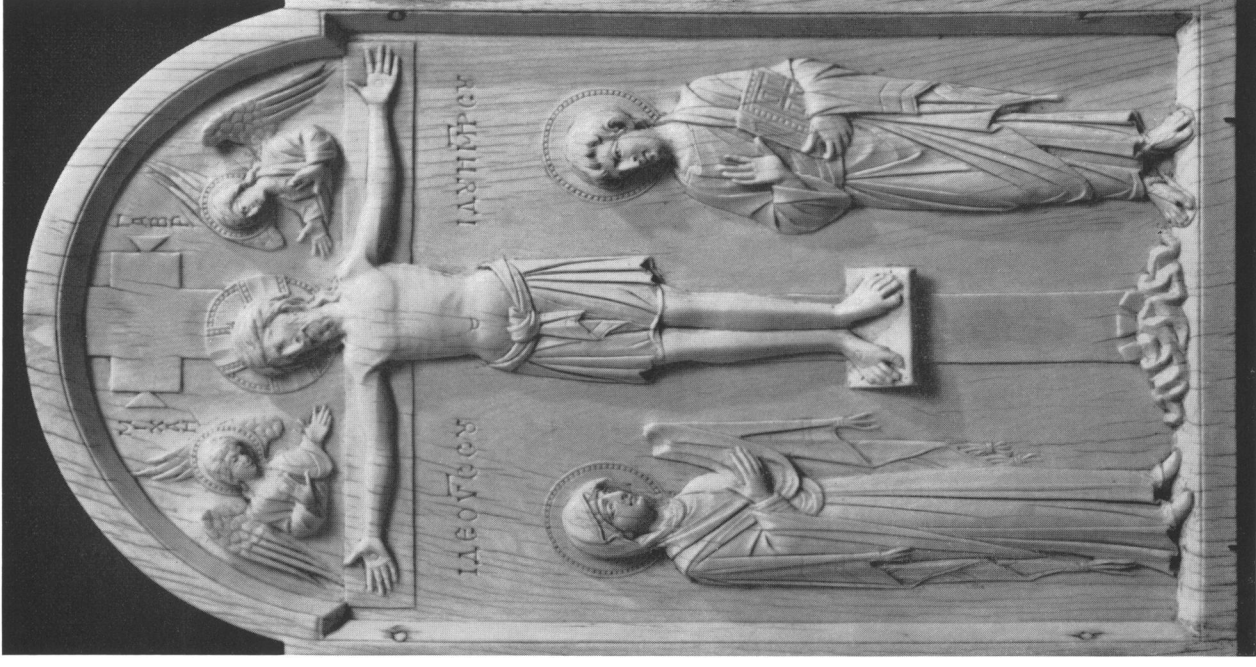
19. Berlin, Staatliche Museen. Ivory Panel,
detail: Massacre of the Innocents



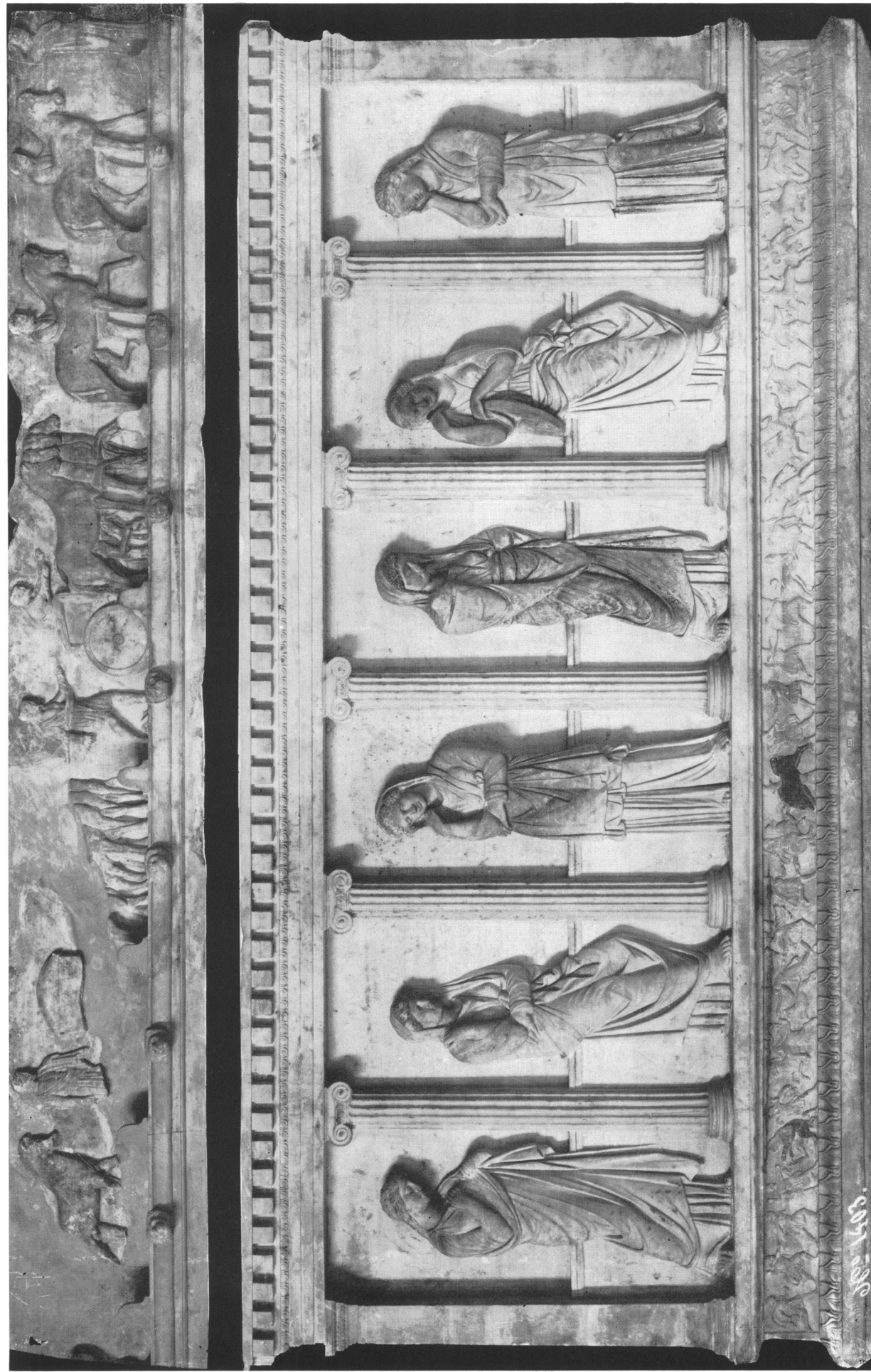
20. Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana. MS Plut. I, 56, fol. 13^r, detail: Crucifixion



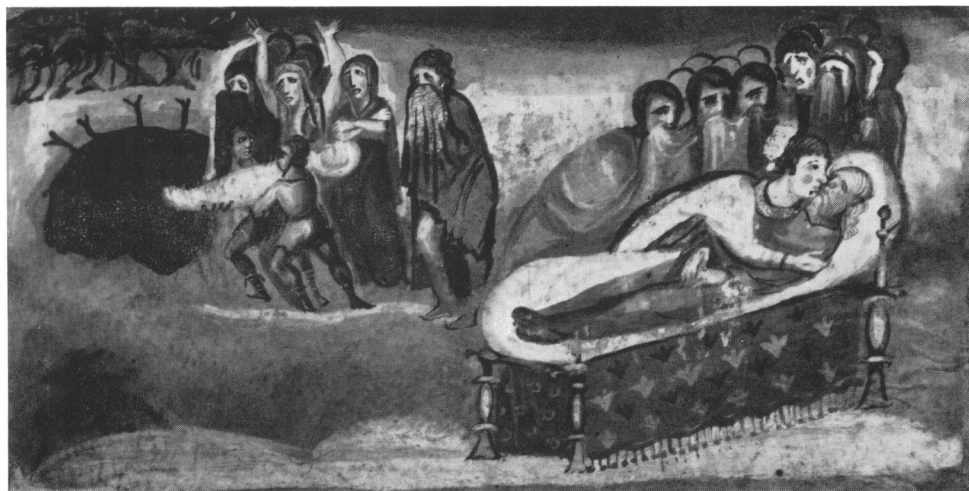
21. Rome, S. Maria Antiqua. Wall Painting of the Crucifixion



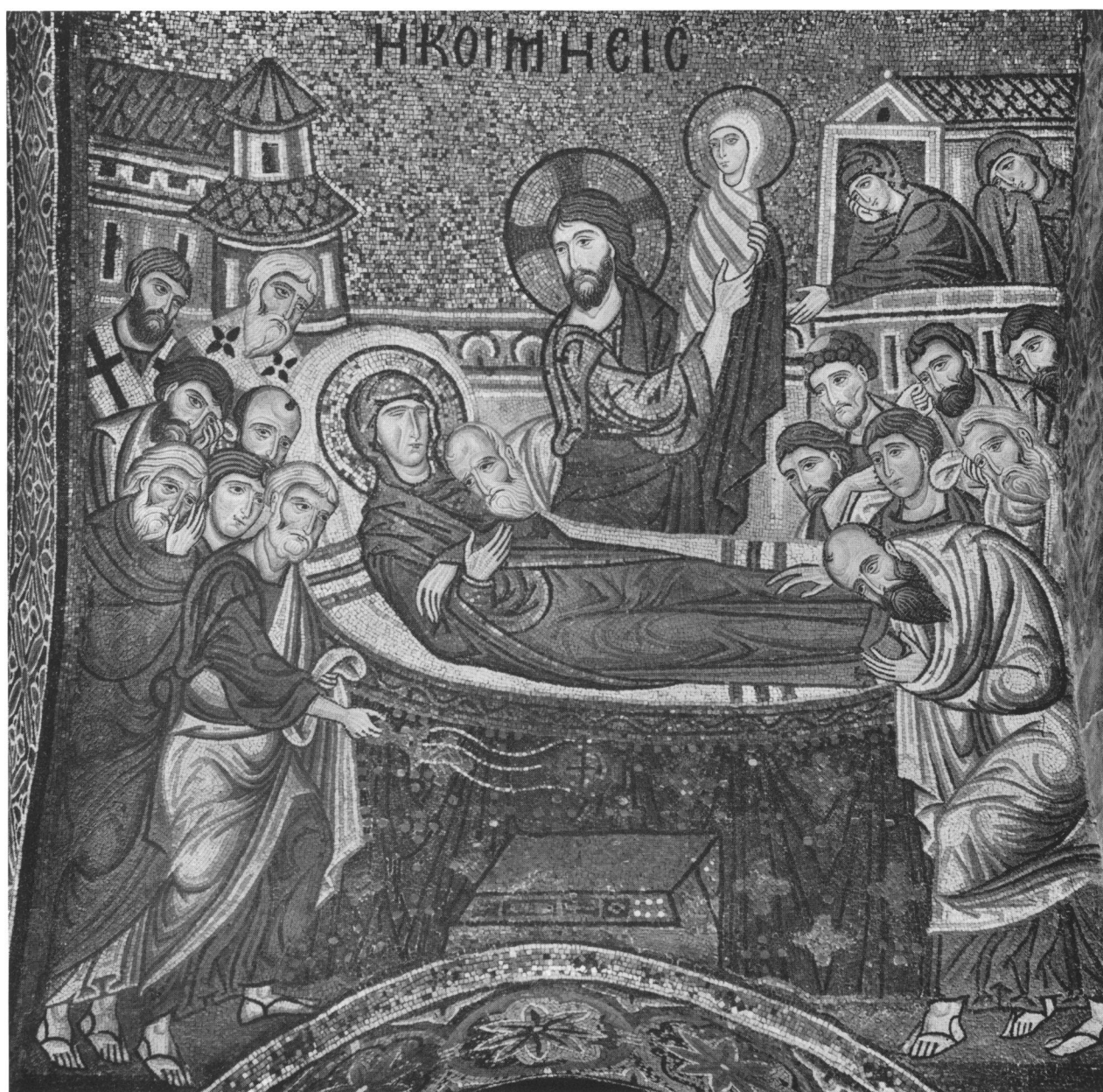
22. London, British Museum. Ivory Triptych, detail: Crucifixion



23. Istanbul, Archaeological Museum. Sarcophagus of Mourning Women, South Side



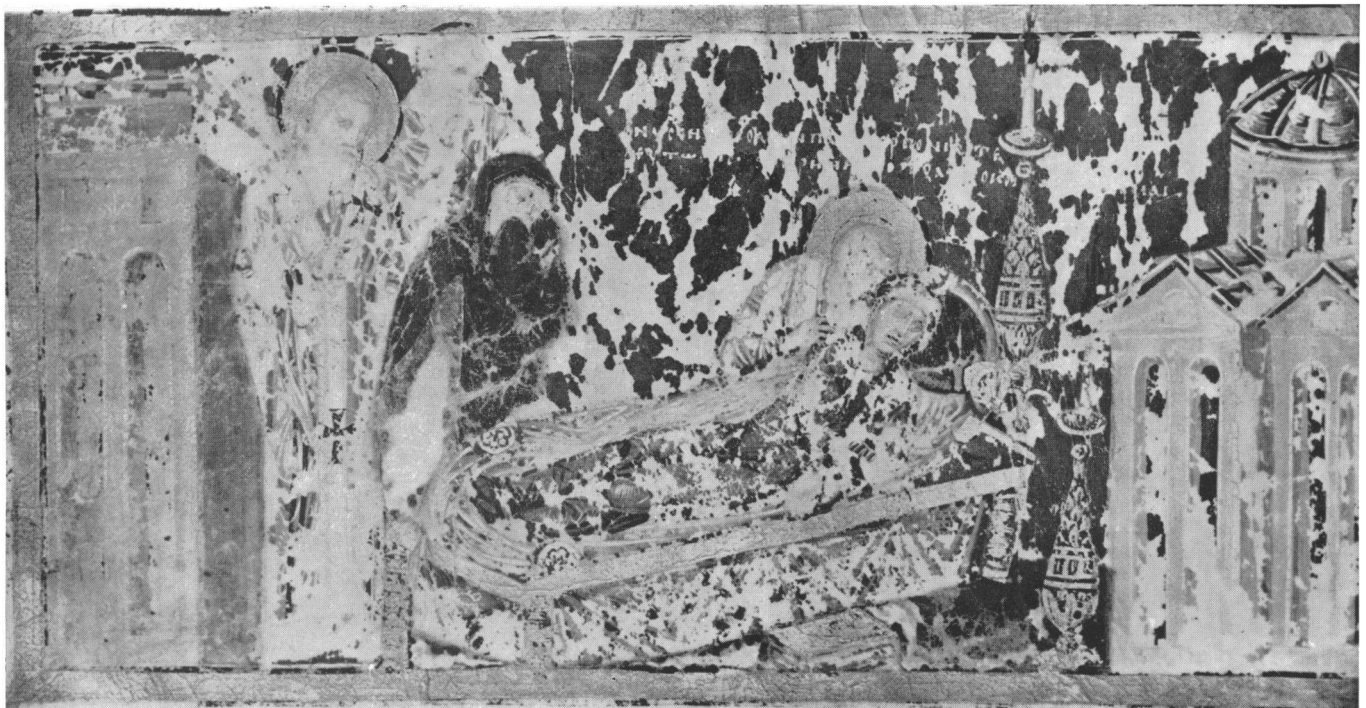
24. Vienna, National Library. MS Theol. gr. 31, p. 48: Death and Burial of Jacob



25. Palermo, Church of the Martorana. Mosaic of the Death of the Virgin



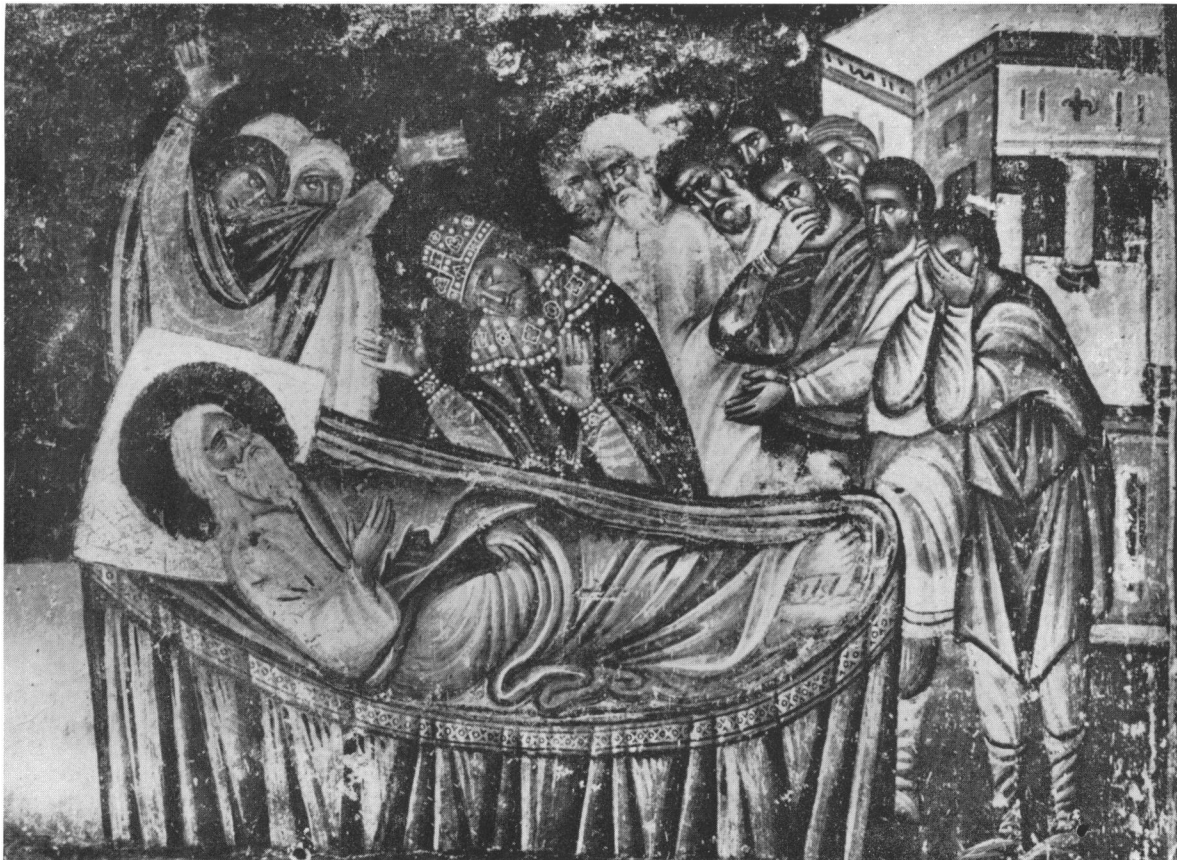
26. Paris, National Library. MS gr. 510, fol. 30v, detail: Crucifixion



27. Paris, National Library. MS gr. 510, fol. 43v, detail: Death of Gorgonia



28. Sopočani, Monastery Church. Wall Painting of the Death of the Virgin



29. Sopočani, Monastery Church. Wall Painting of the Death of Jacob



30. Nerezi, St. Panteleimon. Wall Painting of the Lamentation



31. Moscow, Tretyakov Gallery. Icon from Vladimir



32. Milan, Cathedral, Treasury. Ivory Book Cover,
detail: Massacre of the Innocents



33. London, British Museum. Silver Plate
from Mildenhall



34. Paris, Cluny Museum. Ivory Casket, detail



35. Sopoćani, Monastery Church. Wall Painting of the Death of the Virgin, detail: Head of an Apostle



36. Berlin, Staatliche Museen. Altar from Pergamon, detail of Frieze: Head



37. Spas-Nereditsa, Church. Detail of Wall Painting: Head of St. John



38. Istanbul, Kariye Djami: Mosaic of the Infant Virgin's First Steps, detail: The Nurse